

ABOUT THIS PROGRAM

ALIEN TALK© was originally created in 2010 by speech and language pathologist, Lucia Smith, to assist **school-aged students with language difficulties**. It aimed to provide these students with a fun way to explore simple sentences for the purpose of enhancing both expression and understanding. Over the years, however, the program's potential to address vocabulary and grammar teaching goals (including the "Grammar knowledge" section of the Australian Curriculum), has led to many teachers adopting **Alien Talk** © for general classroom programming within Australia and also overseas.



ALIEN TALK © is an extremely versatile program. It not only develops **verbal expression and verbal comprehension**, but also **written expression and reading comprehension**. It can be used with students who have **minimal word combinations and small lexicons (vocabulary)** to those who require **extension in their sentence-building, awareness of morphemes and word-use**.

COLOURED ALIENS—THE CONCEPT: The notion of colouring sentence components is not new, but the coloured *aliens* add a unique dimension to the program. The feature of the alien characters that promotes this learning is their **lack of knowledge** about “earthly matters” and the language we use. This reinforces the need to provide each alien with **clear, unambiguous and specific** information that responds to their individual enquiry. No previous knowledge can be assumed!

VISUAL CUES: The **multiple visual cues** used within the program aim to assist students who have weak auditory systems. These visual cue systems include:

- 1) use of **sign language and gesture** (Auslan sign language is used in this program)
- 2) the **aliens' features** - the WHEN alien wears a watch, the WHERE alien has eyes which are looking around, the WHAT DOING alien looks rather active and so on...
- 3) the use of **colour-coding**. The colours assigned to the aliens were the same as those originally used by Alison Bryan in her Colourful Semantics program. 1

THE FOUR LEVELS: The teaching within the program is explicit and systematic and addresses several different levels of potential language deficit. Of course, a language deficit is never straightforward, but for the sake of simplicity, the student's needs should be considered across the four levels below. **ALIEN TALK** © can be used to address all levels throughout its the program, although the first three are targeted in greater depth. The levels below relate to verbal expression.

1. An idea is generated by the speaker. The speaker wants to convey the idea and understands that the message is not yet in the listener's brain.

2. The necessary words are chosen and placed in order. The words are specific and non-ambiguous to help the listener generate a clear picture in his brain.

3. Grammar is added. This may include tense or adding plural markers.

4. The words are spoken correctly and clearly so the listener can understand them.

Determining the Level of Breakdown

Students with communication difficulties may have a breakdown at any of the levels below. As a teacher, careful consideration should be made, with the help of a speech pathologist, about where the primary deficit lies. Intervention should then be adjusted to suit the student's needs. ALIEN TALK © can be viewed as a whole bank of resources (pictures, worksheets, activity ideas) that can be used according to each student's level of functioning. Some students, for example, may not embark upon all parts of the program as mastery of early stages (Parts One to Four) is first required.

The input of a speech pathologist is highly recommended to assess and adapt the program as needed.

Consider the following levels below and the types of speech that suggest difficulty in each area.

1. An idea is generated by the speaker. The speaker wants to convey the idea and understands that the message is not yet in the listener's brain.

Difficulties in this area are "pragmatic impairments". They may be characterized by:

- the student talks about things that the listener knows nothing about
- the student produces incomplete messages assuming that the listener understands
- the student is not interested in conveying any messages to the listener

2. The necessary words are chosen and placed in order. The words are specific and non-ambiguous to help the listener generate a clear picture in his brain.

Difficulties in this area may be characterized by:

- the student cannot think of necessary words (word-finding problems)
- the student uses many non-specific words such as "He do the thingy".
- the student speaks round in circles using very little content words such as "He went to...Went down the... to that place... and you know.... Did that ... at the place there."
- Inaccurate word order ("Mum got the dog" for "The dog got Mum").
- lack of verbs ("Mum the naughty dog".).

3. Grammar is added. This may include tense or adding plural markers.

Difficulties in this area may be characterized by:

- overuse of -ed for past tense
- mixed verb tense
- lack of grammatical markers

4. The words are spoken correctly and clearly so the listener can understand them.

Difficulties in this area may be characterized by:

- mumbling or difficulties with sound production

CONCEPTS USED

TICKS AND QUESTION MARKS

These cards can be printed from the PART 1 FOLDER. The small cards can be used in individual sessions and the large cards can be used in group sessions. They should be used throughout the program to give feedback about the clarity of a message. The QUESTION MARK card should be placed at the top of the ALIEN CARD or held up:

- if an ambiguous word is used
- if a message is mumbled
- if the speaker assumes knowledge that is not shared (for example, the speaker does not stipulate who is being spoken about and simply uses a word like “She....”)

Always explain WHY the attempt was not understood. When the message is clarified, change the QUESTION MARK card to a TICK card and explain what made the sentence clearer.

Throughout the program, the word “teacher” is used. This term is used for teachers, aides, integration aides, parents and speech pathologists.

ALIENS’ BRAINS

Each alien has a specific question they want answered and if it is answered clearly, tell the student that it allows them to make a clear “picture in their brain” that is the same as the “picture/idea in the speaker’s brain.”

BEING SPECIFIC

“Being specific” is something that is discussed throughout the program. For young students, or for those who are functioning at a very low level, this concept may be too difficult, but for others it is a very useful concept to understand.

THE ALIENS Each alien is introduced and studied within PARTS TWO to NINE.

Each has a designated colour and each asks a question about a message, idea or picture. The question should be adapted according to the context of the message, idea or picture. For example, if you were looking at two men who had caught a fish, you would take the YELLOW CARD and ask “What did they do?” (Not “What are they doing?” as written on the yellow alien card).

COLOUR	QUESTION	FUNCTION IN A SENTENCE
Orange	Who?	Who is doing the action ? (Subject)
Yellow	What (Orange) doing?	What is the action being done? (Verb)
Green	What? Who?	What/who is the action being done to? (Object)
Blue	Describe— What is Who/What like?	Describe Who/What (Adjective)
Red	Where?	Where is the action being done? (often a Prepositional phrase)
Pink	How?	How is the action being done? (Adverb)
Purple	When?	When is the action being done? (Time word or phrase)
Brown	Why?	Why is the action being done?

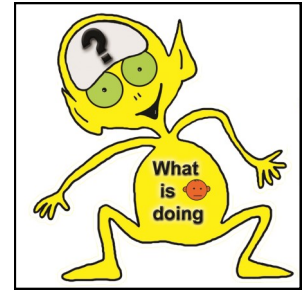
You will note from the function of words in the sentence that ALL (except BLUE) focus on the action word/verb (YELLOW). THE YELLOW WORD is what *makes* a sentence!

See over the page...

THE ALIENS

YELLOW WORDS are VERY IMPORTANT!

This program is about creating simple sentences and a **sentence is a group of words that make sense, that conveys a message and that contains a YELLOW WORD.** In all of this program, the YELLOW WORDS are the most important and much time should be spent on these. (YELLOW WORDS are covered in PART THREE, but are re-visited when time and tense is covered in PART EIGHT.) Whenever questions are generated using the ALIEN CARDS, they should be generated AROUND the YELLOW WORD. The exception is the BLUE ALIENS. They are there to simply describe the GREEN or ORANGE WORD and make our message more interesting and easier to visualize.



For example, take the sentence:

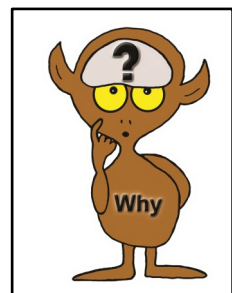
“Yesterday, the little girl ate a fresh green apple in the yard.”

The YELLOW WORD is ate (eat)
Orange Alien would ask “Who ate the apple?”
Yellow Alien would ask “What did the girl do?”
Green Alien would ask “What did the girl eat?”
Red Alien would ask “Where did the girl eat the apple?”
Pink Alien would ask “How did the girl eat the apple?”
Purple Alien would ask “When did the girl eat the apple?”
(The BLUE ALIENS would say: Describe the girl, and describe the apple.)

A NOTE ON THE BROWN ALIEN:

The BROWN ALIEN asks “Why?” and really has no place on the SIMPLE SENTENCE STRUCTURE SPACESHIP! He has been included as an extension task for students who have mastered all of the other parts and are ready to start making more complex sentences.

Again, the Brown Alien asks his question about the YELLOW WORD. For the above sentence, he would ask “Why did the little girl eat the apple?”



Feeling confused? Don't worry. Each alien is studied systematically so by the end of the program, it will all make sense!

The important thing to remember is:

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ARE GENERATED IN RELATION TO
THE YELLOW WORD .**

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAM

ALIEN TALK © consists of a USB stick or CD-ROM full of data to view or print, a pack of ten cards and a “sentence spaceship”.

The program contains many pictures (JPEG images in folders, slideshows and picture cards to print), worksheets and activity ideas. Some activities rely on reading and writing skills so will not be appropriate for all students. These can be adapted to be listening and speaking tasks.

TIP: Add adhesive magnetic strip to the back of cards and stick them to a magnetic whiteboard. Written tasks can be completed underneath.

- Each part contains a text document (PDF) that will look something like: **Part Two—ORANGE—WHO and also a folder called “RESOURCES YOU WILL NEED.”** The text document is very important to read before beginning each section. It explains how to introduce and study each alien. **You will find many tasks outlined within this document and many will refer to resources in the “RESOURCES YOU WILL NEED” folder.** It is recommended, where possible, to view image files (JPEGs) and slideshows on a digital device to minimize the need to print resources.
- Not all tasks need to be completed within each part, nor do they need to be completed in order (except for those activities that obviously build on to an earlier one.) Familiarize yourself with the resources provided for each section and feel free to modify activities and to create some of your own!
- In the folder “BEGIN HERE”, you will find a folder called “RESOURCES YOU WILL NEED” and within this, “ALIEN PICTURES”. Here you will find pictures of all of the aliens in a variety of formats. These can be used to make extra resources. For example, pictures can be enlarged, laminated and hung around a classroom.
- In this resources folder you will also find a document “Using Sign Language” which is an important document to study. All adults working and living with the student would benefit from learning and using these signs as they can greatly assist with the transfer of learning across contexts.
- In this folder, you will also find a folder “CERTIFICATES”. On completion of each part, a student can be presented with the corresponding certificate. The “Spaceship Certificate” is another fun way to show progression through the program. On completion of each part, the corresponding alien can be coloured. When they are all coloured, the certificate is presented. Note that some students may be functioning at a level where only the first few parts of the program are appropriate for intervention. If this is the case, do not introduce the Spaceship Certificate, but use the individual alien certificates instead.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAM (Cont...)

- Some students will move very quickly through some parts of the program whereas others will need more practice and more discussion around a certain alien. A student should demonstrate a good understanding of an alien before moving on to the next part.
- In each part (PART TWO to NINE) a new alien is introduced, but there may also be some activities that link back to aliens that have been studied earlier. This is important for a student to consolidate what they have already learnt with their current learning. Therefore, you should start at the beginning of the program and work through each part from one to ten.

NOTES:

- Some WORD CARD documents appear to be the same except for the number 1 or 2 that follows the title. Titles ending in 1 are colour and should be printed on whitepaper/card. Titles ending in 2 are the same but black and white and should be printed on the relevant coloured paper/card. This is the preferred option to reduce colour-printing costs!
- The titles of some documents are long, so instead of writing all the colour names, sometimes only the first letter is used. For example, OYG refers to ORANGE, YELLOW, GREEN.
- Where headings refer to the colour plus the ALIEN name (for example, PURPLE ALIEN), the resource is usually a picture of the alien. Where the heading refers to the colour and something else (for example, PURPLE IMAGES), the materials are those that can be used within that section's tasks.

*** HAVE A LOOK IN ALL THE FOLDERS AND IT WILL BECOME CLEAR!**

- Colours are a key part of this program. Start to collect coloured folders, containers and decorations to use in each section of the program. For example, in introducing the ORANGE ALIEN, you might decorate the room with orange balloons, have orange textas available and a box covered in orange paper and full of cut-out people from magazines.
- Homework/follow-up is important for some students—but be sure to keep it fun and motivating. HOMEWORK KITS are available. These can be loaned out and returned when a student/client has finished with the program. (See over...)

TRANSFER OF LEARNING

The language studied and practised throughout the program should generalize to spontaneous use if an effort is made for the transfer of learning. It is important that those working and living with the student are aware of current goals and the strategies being used to achieve these (see below).

Some ways to assist with the transfer of learning include:

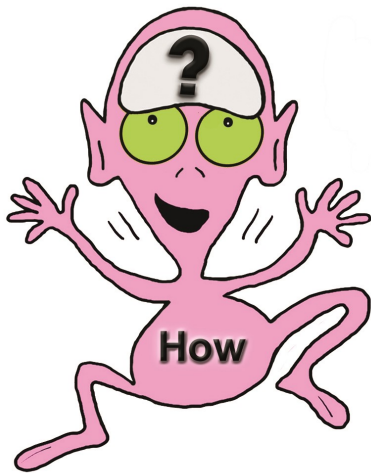
- running a quick training session for involved parties.
- encouraging the teacher or parent to use sign language when prompting clarification from a student when they are speaking
- prompting a student in a writing task by laying down a few alien cards, thus providing a framework for the sentence construction
- referring to the colour of the word required in a sentence (written or spoken)
- having the alien cards handy at “Show ‘n’ Tell” time to prompt a student’s oral presentation to the class
- having the cards present to use in generating questions about a story
- having coloured posters around the room listing the corresponding words or phrases
- creating a booklet containing pages depicting each alien with corresponding words that relate to a certain class in school (eg. ART CLASS: YELLOW WORDS to do with art, RED WORDS to do with art, YELLOW WORDS to do with art).
- using the QUESTION MARK AND TICK cards to give feedback about a student’s message (written or spoken).
- providing short bursts of fun homework/follow-up tasks (See HOMEWORK KITS below).

Remember that the Alien Talk program can tie in with other grammar programs too. The page “Sentence Parts” (found in BEGIN HERE—RESOURCES YOU WILL NEED folder) can be displayed to show how the aliens relate to the labels often used in other sentence programs...



HOMEWORK KITS

- Homework kits are a quick, easy and economical way to provide materials for your students or clients without breaching copyright. A homework kit can be kept in a lending library to be used when needed and then returned.
- Homework Kits do not require any printing on behalf of the parent/aide carrying out the homework.
- **Kits consist of:** A coloured Alien star-chart, a brief program overview, a homework planner, a set of 10 Alien Cards, a USB stick containing ALL slideshows and JPEG images for home practise.
- **Homework kits can only be purchased by those who have purchased or are purchasing The Alien Talk program. Contact lucia@pelicantalk.com if you would like to purchase a homework kit. (Available in lots of 1, 5 or 10).**



SUPPORT

Support is available by emailing
lucia@pelicantalk.com

All questions are welcome!

Training sessions are available on
request at your service or school.

REFERENCES

1. Bryan, A. (1997) Colourful Semantics: thematic role therapy. In Chiat, S., Law, J. and Marshall, J. (Eds) Language Disorders in Children and Adults: Psycholinguistic approaches to therapy. London: Whurr
2. Cumine, V., Leac, J., and Stevenson, G. (1998) Asperger's Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Teachers. David Fulton Publishers.

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- Black, M. & Chiat, S. (2003). Linguistics for clinicians. London: Arnold.
- Gillies, M. (1986), Language through Reading. British Journal of Special Education, 13: 71-73.
- Rozakis, L. (2003) English Grammar for the Utterly Confused. McGraw-Hill

FINAL NOTES:

REDUCE WASTE: The ALIEN TALK © cards are made from 100% recycled card. Where possible, pictures have been included on the CD-ROM in JPEG or slideshow format so that they can be viewed on a digital device instead of printed. If you prefer to print materials, it is recommended that you laminate them to use again and again.

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